



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 170

Great Easton & Tilty and Thaxted parishes – 5.8 miles (9 kms)
(with an option to extend by 1 mile)

This mainly rural walk explores parts of these two parishes without visiting either Great Easton village or the town of Thaxted (or the hamlet of Tilty unless you choose to add a mile at the end). The route starts in the village of Duton Hill and passes through the Thaxted hamlet of Monk Street where the Farmhouse Inn offers an opportunity for refreshment (although it is normally closed on Wednesdays). Duton Hill also has a pub, The Three Horseshoes, but with limited opening hours. If you hope to stop at either please check opening times first. If you plan to stop, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. Some paths may be muddy. There are no stiles. There are seats by Tilty church.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes near the western end of Duton Hill where there is normally room for two or three cars in a small roadside parking area.
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL603269 - Postcode: CM6 2EB.
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

From the parking area we head uphill to walk through Duton Hill. We should generally stay on the right, facing any oncoming traffic. The village of Duton Hill is in the parish of Great Easton which joined some years ago with the parish of Tilty to form a single administrative parish called Great Easton and Tilty.

On the right, we soon cross the entrance to Abbey View, a residential road whose name refers to the view from some of the houses, looking south-west across the Chelmer valley to the ruins of Tilty Abbey, about 300 yards to the south-west. *[The basic 5.8 mile route does not include Tilty, but there is an optional 1 mile extension at the end. Alternatively, Tilty can be visited as part of Walk number 120]*

On the left we pass Tudor Cottage. This dates from the 17th century and operated as a pub, The Rising Sun, until the 1980s. Note the patterned roof tiles.

The next house on the left, thatched Deers Leap Cottage, probably dates from the 16th century.

Next, Elizabeth Cottage has been dated to around 1500 AD when it was built as an open hall house. Originally, it would have had one large room that extended from the ground to the roof and a central fire whose smoke would drift upwards and out through vents in the roof. The chimneys would have been added later and a floor inserted to create the upper storey.

Opposite Elizabeth Cottage, we pass a second entrance to Abbey View.

Further up, on the right, the timber-framed and plastered Abbey Cottage dates from around 1600 AD.

Soon afterwards, we pass The Three Horseshoes, Duton Hill's rather quirky pub. This is a popular meeting place for locals and for local organisations. In 2021 it usually opened for lunch only on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Opposite the pub, the house called The Warrens was built in 1632.

We continue along the lane, after a while heading downhill with countryside views to our right.

On the left we pass Duton Hill Farm and then, set back, The Barn House, a 17th-18th century barn converted for modern living.

On the right is Patmers, a house with a stag emblem which indicates that this was once part of the estate of the Maynard family of Little Easton. [See walk number 163].

On the left we pass The Old Forge which dates from the early 19th century.

Shortly before the road junction, we should use the pavement on the right. We follow the pavement round to the right, joining the sometimes-busy B184. After only about 30 yards, before a bridge, when safe, we cross the main road via the traffic island. At the other side, we have to step over a metal barrier in order to join a public footpath.

We go straight ahead, down a small slope and through a few trees. Soon we come into a field and follow the field-edge path with hedgerow on our right, heading east. Behind the hedgerow is a stream which flows west to join the River Chelmer. We will follow this grass path beside the stream for about half a mile. For a while, the road runs beside us on the left, but gradually we leave it behind.

About 300 yards after leaving the road, we keep straight on, ignoring a footbridge that goes right over the stream. Over to our left, beyond the solar panels, is Blamster's Hall which dates from the 16th century. In another 50 yards, we go straight ahead on a footbridge with metal handrails over a ditch.

At the end of a narrow field with paddocks on the left, we pass through a wooden gate and continue ahead on a field-edge path with hedgerow on the right.

At the end of this field, we cross a ditch on a footbridge with no handrails, continuing with the stream to our right.

At the end of this field, a wide track leaves to the right over a concrete bridge, but we do not go across the bridge. Our route bears round to the left, still with field edge and river on our right.

At the end of this field, we go straight ahead to leave the field and turn left onto a lane which climbs gently. When safe, we should cross to the right to face any traffic.

We pass several buildings on the right. The first on the left, a thatched cottage with no obvious name, is believed to date from the 14th century when it was built as a hall house.

On the right, Nicholls Farm dates from the 18th century.

We are now in the Great Easton hamlet of Little Cambridge and, on the left at the top of the hill, we pass Cambridge House with interesting chimney pots. Just beyond a second entrance to Cambridge House, a public footpath crosses the road and we turn right onto this path with hedgerow on the right. After a few yards, the path becomes tree-lined and later more open, always very clear – but we need to watch for when to leave it!

About a quarter mile after leaving the road, the field on our left ends and we reach the corner of a new field on our left. Telephone wires pass overhead and the main path bears right. Here, we fork left off the main path, effectively going straight on. [By way of further reference, we have just passed a pole on the left that carries an intersection of telephone cables]. In just a few yards we meet up with the hedgerow on our right and then we bear left, away from the hedge and now on a clear cross-field path.

After about 200 yards, at the far side of the field, we go straight ahead across a wooden footbridge with metal handrails. On the far side, we go straight ahead on another clear cross-field path.

After another 200 yards, we pass through trees and reach a concrete roadway. Here we kink just a little to the left to keep straight ahead on the roadway. As we came through those trees we passed from the parish of Great Easton & Tilty into the parish of Thaxted.

We stay on the concrete roadway for about 300 yards and then pass beside a gate to emerge onto a lane. On our right is a house called The Shieling. Shielings tended to be found in Scotland and the north of England: they were shelters used by people tending livestock on higher ground. Here, we are about 330 feet or 100 metres above sea level.

We turn right onto the lane and are now in the hamlet of Sibley's Green, part of the parish of Thaxted. We pass several attractive residential properties and then enter Sibley Green Farm whose farmhouse and barn date from the 18th century. We keep straight ahead on a gravel drive, descending between various farm buildings and then crossing over a ditch.

We keep straight ahead (ignoring a footpath to our left and a path to the right), now heading gently uphill on a wide grass track between fields.

As we approach the top of this climb, we can see the tall spire of Thaxted's parish church, about 2 miles away to our left.

As we reach the ends of the fields on each side, we bear right, staying on the public bridleway with hedgerow on our left. The path meanders, following the field edge.

After a while, we pass the first building for some time, Whittakers. It originated in the early 16th century and was extended in the 20th century. Note the bell outside the back door.

We soon reach a lane where we turn left, now passing the front of Whittakers. We will keep to the right as usual.

We are now in the hamlet of Richmond's Green. On the left, we pass some new barn-style houses and then 16th-century Gladwyn's Farm with its 16th-century chimney stack.

On the right, we pass the entrance to Richmond's Farm (signposted to Richmonds Gn). The farmhouse, behind farm buildings and not visible from here, dates from the 14th century.

Continuing along the lane, for some distance we walk beside a neatly trimmed hedge on the right. When it comes to an end, to our right we can see Thaxted's church and also Thaxted's windmill.

Now, the view ahead opens up and we have a panoramic view of the Chelmer valley and the hills beyond. Our lane descends down into the valley.

Straight ahead, there is a white water tower on the horizon – this is about 2 miles distant, near Cutlers Green, another hamlet of Thaxted parish. A little to the right of the water tower, a rather strange 'tree' protrudes above the tree line – this is actually a mobile phone mast in disguise.

Looking a little to the left, about 10 o'clock on the clockface, on a clear day we may be able to see the tall control tower at Stansted Airport. This is about 6 miles away.

At the foot of the descent, we reach Dunmow Road, the B184, and turn left, keeping to the wide grass verge on the left. This road basically follows the alignment of a Roman road that once ran from Radwinter, 4 miles north of here, through Dunmow and High Roding to London. Today, we are unlikely to see a chariot, but the road is often busy and noisy.

After about 200 yards, we draw level with a lane on the right. When safe, we cross and proceed along the lane, signposted to Farmhouse Inn. We are now in the Thaxted hamlet of Monk Street and we reach the inn after about 100 yards. The inn dates from the 15th century when it was built as an open hall house. In the wall outside there is a Victorian post box.

We may wish to seek refreshment here.

Not long ago, the pub was called The Greyhound. For some years it was run by a former professional footballer, John Radford, a prolific goal scorer for Arsenal in the 1960s and 1970s.

We continue past the pub on our left. After another 100 yards, we turn right onto a narrow lane, signposted to Folly Mill.

Just after the bungalow called Willow Close on the left, we may be able to see a substantial, raised narrow-gauge railway track in a field. This seems to be a leftover from about 30 years ago when the landowner collected, built and restored engines.

The lane crosses over the River Chelmer. It flows from our right to left, heading south towards Chelmsford and then Maldon where it joins the River Blackwater to flow into the North Sea. We will go just a few yards beyond the river to see Folly Mill on our left. The building dates from the 16th century and was extended in the 17th. [It was offered for sale in 2021 together with some 200 acres for £2.75million].

Having looked at Folly Mill, we will retrace to cross back over the river and turn right onto a footpath that is signposted as Harcamlow Way (an 80 mile figure-of-eight trail between Harlow and Cambridge). We soon get another view of Folly Mill on the right.

We will follow this path, heading south in a fairly straight line with the Chelmer close by on our right, for about 1.5 miles back to Duton Hill where we started.

We do not need a blow-by-blow account of the next mile and a half. Generally, we should keep to the right of each field and meadow that we pass through, with the hedgerow and river just to our right. Sometimes the river is bordered by willow trees. Most fields are quite narrow. Further along, sometimes there is a choice of path but they come back together. The fields vary: some very uncultivated and full of wild flowers, whilst another is maintained like a lawn. At one point, the path dips a little, almost to river level, for a short distance and may be muddy here at times.

Halfway along this riverside path, our route passes imperceptibly from Thaxted parish, back into Great Easton & Tilty.

Eventually, we go through a wooden gate and then through an informal arboretum, passing a bungalow on our left. We go through another wooden gate and emerge onto a lane. We are back in Duton Hill. With care, cross the lane and turn left. Very soon we return to where we parked.

Should you wish to visit Tilty, it is included in Walk number 120. If you would like to visit Tilty today, please follow the italicised paragraphs which are mainly copied from Walk 120.

If you wish to visit Tilty, from the parking area head back down the hill and cross the bridge over the Chelmer. The route described below is basically an anti-clockwise loop, marked with small arrows at the bottom left of the map on the final page of this walk description.

At the road junction, turn left onto the lane and, in only about 20 yards, turn right onto a footpath with hedgerow on the right.

After about 200 yards, at the end of the field, go ahead through the gap into the next field and turn left, with hedgerow on the left. Follow this path, now with trees on the left.

Soon, pass over a stream, often dry, and then ignore a gravel track that comes in from the left just before Tilty Mill on the right. Do pause to look at what remains of this 18th-century

water mill on a tributary of the River Chelmer. Whilst listed as Grade II ('Grade two star'), it has been sadly neglected for many years and is also listed as "heritage at risk". The mill is probably on the site of a much earlier mill or mills.*

Opposite the corner of the mill our route heads away from the mill, passing through a gateway into a field. Almost immediately there is an interpretation panel which explains the ruins just ahead and the mill just behind. This is the site of Tilty Abbey, founded by Cistercian monks in 1153 AD and a significant community for centuries until the monastery was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1536. There is another interpretation panel near the ruins. Continue on the cross-field path, uphill towards Tilty Church. Over to the left, on the hill beyond the ruins, is the hamlet of Duton Hill.

Pass through a gate. There is another interpretation panel just to the right. It was about here where the gatehouse to the abbey once stood. Continue ahead to the entrance to the churchyard on the right. You are encouraged to visit the church, removing boots or donning covers if muddy.

Tilty Church was built around 1220 AD, outside the grounds of the abbey and close to the gatehouse, to serve visitors and other members of the abbey community because only the monks were allowed to use the abbey church.

Tilty church has two distinct architectural styles. The element closest to the footpath, with its great east window, is the chancel, added around 1330 AD. To the rear is the older nave with a bell turret that was added in the 18th century.

Leave the churchyard and turn right onto the lane. Hugh Hall, immediately on the left, is presumably named after Hugh Cuthbertson, a mid-20th-century vicar who was probably most famed for his work establishing a tobacco-growing co-operative that helped smokers to grow their own and thereby smoke more cheaply by avoiding tobacco duty. Hugh Hall is attached to the former vicarage where he lived.

Just before the end of this short lane, note the emblems on the 1845 cottages on the right: a stag and a large "M". These were symbols of the Maynard family who for many years were lords of the manor in nearby Little Easton.

At the end of the church lane, turn left onto another lane. Beware of traffic and keep to the right.

Before the bottom of the hill, we should look back to the great east window of Tilty Church. At the road junction, when safe, we cross to the far side of the new lane and turn left.

Note the concrete "pillbox" on the right – constructed during World War II along with many others along the Chelmer to provide a line of defence against the threatened invasion by Germany.

In about a quarter mile, turn right into Duton Hill and soon return to where we parked.

You can read more about the parishes of Great Easton & Tilty and Thaxted on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 12 September 2021, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.

A diagram covering the route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498. The main 5.8 miles is indicated by a bold line and the optional extra 1 mile by small arrows.

